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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; PRESIDENT BUSH'S LATAM TOUR; FREE TRADE
DEALS; 03/21/07; BUENOS AIRES

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's most important international stories focus on US Assistant Secretary Thomas Shannon's remarks about the "positive" results of

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US President Bush's tour of Latin America; and Professor Richard Feinberg's press round table in Buenos Aires on international trade and free trade deals.

2. OPINION PIECES

- "Shannon - '(Bush's) tour was very useful"

Ana Baron, Washington-based correspondent for leading "Clarín," comments (03/21) "After attending a press conference by (US Assistant Secretary) Tom Shannon, the Bush administration's strong man for Latin America who made an assessment of US President Bush's tour of the region, one journalist said: 'If Shannon was named US Ambassador to Iraq, he would certainly go to Saddam Hussein's grave and tell him that the US is willing to speak to him as long as he is willing to speak with the US.'

"Putting jokes aside, Shannon is convinced that today there is only room for dialogue in our region. According to him, our countries abandoned authoritarianism and opened its economies, but now the second stage is ahead, in which the challenge is how to make democracies include all the excluded of the system. Shannon believes it is a 'crucial moment,' in which 'there is no room for confrontation.'

"... Shannon said that the US is willing to provide the 'required cooperation' to solve the Ecuadorian crisis... He termed Bush's tour of Latin America as 'positive' and very 'useful.' According to him, it served to remind Americans of the importance of the Americas and to show Latin Americans the 'human face' of Washington's policies for the region. Shannon praised Bush's relationship with Lula and said that Uruguay is 'a trustworthy and useful partner.'"

- "Washington criticizes Mercosur and suggests to hold bilateral negotiations"

Alejandro Bercovich, economic columnist of business-financial "El Cronista," penned (03/21) "Governments may not openly express some opinions but they can convey those messages in other ways, whether private or public. Perhaps, this is why this time the piece of advice came out of the mouth of academic Richard Feinberg, former advisor o Bill Clinton and current professor at the University of California.

"During a press round table, Feinberg said 'The world does not wait and your country is relatively closed to international trade. Free

trade agreements help open markets and attract investors.'

"... Just a few days after US President George W. Bush ended his tour of Latin America (which excluded Argentina), Washington resumed the initiative with a trade bloc that many see too much 'inclined to the left' in the aftermath of Venezuela's incorporation.

"Feinberg underlined that Brazil-led Mercosur's negotiations with third markets did not reap positive results. 'What agreements have you been able to reach? Not any deal with Chile, or with the Andean countries, the US or the EU.' And he concluded: 'It is obvious that Uruguayans are frustrated over the little progress obtained in discussions.'

"Clinton's former advisor also praised the recovery of Argentina's economy (which he termed as 'wonderful') although he said he was surprised by the 'changes in foreign policy' which, in his opinion, have distanced the two governments. 'In a not too distant future, both countries will again enjoy a friendly and harmonious relationship.'

"... The expert also listed all the advantages offered, in his view, by free trade deals. In addition to opening new markets, he mentioned the effect of preventing other competitors from obtaining positions vis-à-vis the country. He also said that free trade deals 'help capturing investment, particularly in countries having changing policies.'

"Nevertheless, according to Oxfam, an anti-subsidies NGO, the US and EU 'are using bilateral and regional deals to obtain tradeoffs they would be unable to obtain on a multilateral level, where developing countries could join (against them).'

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